

# Spotlight on Program Quality

What are the requirements, expectations, and best practices for maximizing the Education Specialist's support of program quality?

## ► Definition of Education Specialist

An Education Specialist plays a significant role in supporting the quality of the COMPASS program. DYCD envisioned the Education Specialist working in partnership with and under the supervision of the on-site Program Director. The Education Specialist must have at least a four-year college degree; experience in lesson planning, curriculum development, and implementation of structured programming for students in elementary and middle school; and preferably, teaching credentials and some teaching experience. We have found that the presence of staff with educational credentials helps raise the credibility of the program in the eyes of school principals and teachers and thereby contributes to successful relationship-building with host schools.

## ► Key Benefits of Education Specialists for Program Quality

1. **Program and Activity Planning** —The Education Specialist has an important role in supporting and strengthening lesson plans, and providing feedback to front-line staff. This means ensuring that all structured activities have clearly defined outcomes (measurable skill gains and/or learning goals for participants). It also means reviewing and adapting curriculum to fit within larger program goals, and establishing a lesson plan process, including writing, reviewing objectives, time allotment, conducting activity observations and providing feedback).

*"The Education Specialist helped "tighten" activities that are drawn from published curricula, intentionally ensuring that the activities (and modifications) fit within the larger goals of the OST program." — Program Director*

2. **Staff Recruitment, Training & Professional Development** — While in most programs the Site Supervisor and on-site Program Director are responsible for recruiting and hiring staff, the Education Specialist can be used strategically to contribute to staffing decisions by identifying and recommending staff from the host school or other networks with strong instructional or teaching skills, especially if the on-site Program Director does not have an education background.

Education Specialists can also offer on-site training because they have the knowledge and skills of a

trainer. The Policy Studies Associates (PSA) study described one case where the Education Specialist who was a veteran teacher at the host school offered on-site trainings in lesson planning and classroom management enforcing instructional strategies later emphasized through coaching and feedback.

DYCD strongly encourages programs to provide staff development opportunities to front line staff. COMPASS programs are allowed to be closed for up to 9 hours of in-service professional development during the 2014-15 school year. Programs can close early on several days or for three 3-hour days. Programs must notify all partners three weeks in advance of the program closure date, including parents, host school principal and staff, NYCHA and Parks facility hosts, and the DYCD program manager.

Feedback from principals indicates that they would like to see more cross training opportunities between host school and COMPASS staff.

3. **School Alignment** — DYCD requires that the school principal and the program provider develop a common vision for the COMPASS program and sign a School Partnership Agreement that outlines how they will work together. These documents form a basis of alignment between the COMPASS program and the school in facilitating alignment between COMPASS activities and school learning goals, collaborative planning, frequent and ongoing communication, and coordination. Ideally, the dedicated Education Specialist can help support program content alignment with school-day curricula and behavior standards.

The best results come when a program has one Education Specialist who is on site during the day and can help facilitate communication between day-school teachers, administrators, and COMPASS program staff. One promising practice is for program staff to schedule regular weekly meetings with school administrators to discuss goals and outcomes for the program or the needs of individual participants, not just program logistics.

*"To have somebody with that expertise would definitely help. The activities that we do here are generally based on what's going on in schools...But, if you wanted to incorporate more math or actually get the level of where [the students] are reading...we really can't support that [without the Education Specialist]." — Program Director*

4. **Continuous Improvement** — COMPASS programs should have a protocol to evaluate program activities and staff to identify best practices and areas in need of improvement. The PSA study indicated that the Education Specialist are effective in the following:

Supporting and evaluating staff who implement activities, by reviewing lesson plans, providing feedback, and observing and evaluating activities in order to improve activity instruction, youth engagement, and overall activity quality.

Providing coaching and professional development built on observations and staff evaluations done during program implementation.

**Please note:** this year we are seeing more programs with in-kind Education Specialists, assigned by host principals. We recommend developing a clear plan with the principal to (a) clarify how this Education Specialist will partner with and complement the on-site director so that a real team approach can be developed; (b) confirm the supervision structure with the on-site program director as the supervisor of the Education Specialist. In addition, a clear communication plan should be established if personnel shifts are required throughout the year, especially regarding timing, notification, and expectations for filling this required position.

### ▶ **Education Specialist Requirements**

- ⇒ Programs with 90 or more participants require an Education Specialist dedicated at least 25 percent of a full-time position for a single COMPASS/SONYC program, or, if working full-time, could work with up to four COMPASS programs. This staffing allocation is confirmed in the program budget and workscope.
- ⇒ Programs with fewer than 90 participants do not require (but do allow) a separate Education Specialist. If a separate Education Specialist is not provided, then the on-site Program Director must act as the Education Specialist.
- ⇒ City Council-funded elementary and Option 2 programs are not required to have an Education Specialist, but are strongly encouraged have one.

As DYCD works with the expanded COMPASS system this year, we will be working to make the role of the Education Specialist less contingent upon the on-site program director's vision for the position and more concretely defined by DYCD expectations and goal for this position, because our experience in the field and that of the PSA evaluation team demonstrates the importance of the Education Specialist role in supporting quality program planning and implementation.

### ▶ **Recent study conducted by Policy Studies Associates (PSA) on qualifications and responsibilities of the Education Specialist provides insightful findings that have also been confirmed by DYCD program staff who conducted site visits last year, including the following:**

1. It is not sufficient to simply fill the position with an appropriate qualified Education Specialist; programs need to think strategically about how the position fits into the context of their program.
2. Even when the Education Specialist has the right qualifications, the role varies according to the on-site Program Director's vision for how the Education Specialist role can complement his or her own.
3. The Education Specialist may have the most impact when the specialist works with a single program and does not have other responsibilities (i.e., does not lead activities or other operational, logistic roles).

The study also indicated that the type of coaching and professional development was contingent upon the knowledge and qualifications of the program staff, making the choice of the Education Specialist all the more important to continuous quality improvement efforts at the site level.

► **Education Specialist Configurations**

Data gathered by DYCD program managers and by PSA indicate we can maximize the benefits of Education Specialists by strategically planning their positions within programs.

What configuration is right for your organization?			
Configuration	How does the configuration work?	How to support this configuration?	
Staffing configurations that work well	<b>A. One dedicated Education Specialist who works in one program only</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⇒ Might be a grade-level teacher from host school who is experienced in differentiating activity content and instructional practices from host school, such as a curriculum developer or teaching coach.</li> <li>⇒ Can help bridge school day and after-school through knowledge of the school day context (e.g., knows the children, teachers, and parents; establishes day school norms and expectations in after school; supports staff development, especially programs with limited teaching experience.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⇒ Ensure that the Education Specialist doesn't have other responsibilities or roles in the out-of-school time program (e.g., directly leading program activities).</li> </ul>
	<b>B. One Education Specialist works in multiple programs (max four programs)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⇒ Allows CBOs to take a more systematic approach to program activities across multiple programs.</li> <li>⇒ A promising example of this staffing plan is when an Educational Specialist identifies formal or in-house curricula, develops a theme-based approach, specifies learning goals to be implemented by activity leaders and replicates these activities across multiple programs (e.g., Educational Specialist developed grade-level binders with curricula and lesson plans with some room for adaptation and choice and provided each school with ongoing professional development focused on implementation).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⇒ Plan and troubleshoot for the limited amount of time one Education Specialist can spend at each site that has only 15 program service hours weekly.</li> <li>⇒ Consider this configuration can limit the real time observation and evaluation of program activities that focus on continuous improvement.</li> </ul>
Staffing configurations that tend to be less effective	<b>C. On-site Program Director acts as Education Specialist</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⇒ Sometimes used in programs with fewer than 90 participants, when the Program Director assumes the responsibilities of the Educational Specialist of educational planning and implementation responsibilities, while also leading, managing, and ensuring the day-to-day operations of the program.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⇒ Staff can be prepared and recognize that this model is less effective because Program Director will not have additional time to work closely with staff to adapt curricula, evaluate staff and coach them in instruction.</li> </ul>
	<b>D. Program-level staff member assumes responsibility of the Education Specialist</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⇒ Only in programs with fewer than 90 participants</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⇒ Staff can be prepared and recognize that this model is less effective than having a dedicated Education Specialist</li> <li>⇒ Work on the connection to the host school as it is less likely with this staffing plan to yield alignment and partnership with school and continuous improvement of program.</li> </ul>